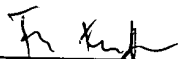


Respectfully submitted,



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January 30, 2002

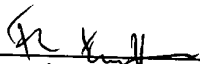
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**ENCLS:**

**Amended Claims;  
Marked-Up Version.**

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CLEAN VERSION OF AMENDED CLAIMS

A' 1. Method for hot dip galvanizing of hot-rolled steel strip, wherein:

- in a first method step, the strip (50) is introduced into a pickling station (10-13) and a layer of scale and reaction products are removed from the strip surface in the pickling station,

- in another method step, the strip (50) is introduced into a rinsing station (21-23) and residues of the pickle and pickling products are removed from the strip surface in the rinsing station, and subsequently

- the strip is introduced into a drying station and is dried, and from there

- in another method step, the strip is introduced into a furnace (40) and is adjusted to galvanizing temperature under a protective gas atmosphere, and

- in a last method step, the strip is guided through a galvanizing bath and the surface of the strip (50) is coated with a hot dip galvanizing layer in the galvanizing bath, wherein the strip temperature in the furnace (40) is adjusted at most to 50 °K above immersion temperature into the zinc bath.

2. Method according to claim 1, wherein the  $H_2$  concentration in the furnace (40) is adjusted to at most 20 %, preferably to less than 5 %.

3. Method according to claim 1, wherein the method steps between the last rinsing stage (23) of the rinsing station (20) through the drying station (30) up to the inlet (43) of the furnace (40) are carried out hermetically screened from ambient oxygen from the surroundings.

4. Method according to claim 1, wherein a water-repellent or water-binding medium (25) which wets the strip (50) is introduced into the last rinsing stage (23) of the rinsing station (20).

5. Method according to claim 4, wherein the medium (25) introduced into the third rinsing stage (23) is  $NH_3$  or a solution containing  $NH_3$ .

6. Method according to claim 1, wherein drying of the strip (50) in the drying station (30) is carried out without the supply of air from the outside by means of heat radiation with the addition of a mixture of nitrogen, hydrogen and ammonia gas ( $N_2/NH_3$ ) +  $H_2$  or another mixture of two of the mentioned gases.

A  
7. Hot dip galvanizing plant, comprising a pickling station (10), a rinsing station (20), a drier (30), a furnace (40) and a subsequent hot dip galvanizing bath (60) wherein the outlet of the last rinsing stage (23) of the rinsing station (20) is connected to the inlet of the drier (30) and the outlet of the drier is connected to the inlet (43) of the furnace (40) through locks (70, 80) and the connections are hermetically sealed from the ambient atmosphere.

8. Installation according to claim 7, wherein the rinsing stages (21-23) and the heating stage (41) and the heating stage (42) are screened from each other by intermediate walls (24).

MARKED-UP VERSION OF AMENDED CLAIMS

1. Method for hot dip galvanizing of hot-rolled steel strip, wherein:

- in a first method step, the strip (50) is introduced into a pickling station (10-13) and a layer of scale and reaction products are removed from the strip surface in the pickling station,

- in another method step, the strip (50) is introduced into a rinsing station (21-23) and residues of the pickle and pickling products are removed from the strip surface in the rinsing station, and subsequently

- the strip is introduced into a drying station and is dried, and from there

- in another method step, the strip is introduced into a furnace (40) and is adjusted to galvanizing temperature under a protective gas atmosphere, and

- in a last method step, the strip is guided through a galvanizing bath and the surface of the strip (50) is coated with a hot dip galvanizing layer in the galvanizing bath,

[characterized in

that] wherein the strip temperature in the furnace (40) is adjusted at most to 50 °K above immersion temperature into the zinc bath.

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2. Method according to claim 1,  
[characterized in  
that] wherein the  $H_2$  concentration in the furnace (40) is adjusted to at  
most 20 %, preferably to less than 5 %.

3. Method according to [claims 1 or 2,  
characterized in  
that] claim 1, wherein the method steps between the last rinsing stage  
(23) of the rinsing station (20) through the drying station (30) up to  
the inlet (43) of the furnace (40) are carried out hermetically screened  
from ambient oxygen from the surroundings.

4. Method according to [claims 1, 2, or 3,  
characterized in  
that] claim 1, wherein a water-repellent or water-binding medium (25)  
which wets the strip (50) is introduced into the last rinsing stage (23)  
of the rinsing station (20).

5. Method according to claim 4,  
[characterized in  
that] wherein the medium (25) introduced into the third rinsing stage  
(23) is  $NH_3$  or a solution containing  $NH_3$ .

6. Method according to [one or more of claims 1 to 5, characterized in that] claim 1, wherein drying of the strip (50) in the drying station (30) is carried out without the supply of air from the outside by means of heat radiation with the addition of a mixture of nitrogen, hydrogen and ammonia gas ( $N_2/NH_3$ ) +  $H_2$  or another mixture of two of the mentioned gases.

7. Hot dip galvanizing plant, comprising a pickling station (10), a rinsing station (20), a drier (30), a furnace (40) and a subsequent hot dip galvanizing bath (60) [characterized in that] wherein the outlet of the last rinsing stage (23) of the rinsing station (20) is connected to the inlet of the drier (30) and the outlet of the drier is connected to the inlet (43) of the furnace (40) through locks (70, 80) and the connections are hermetically sealed from the ambient atmosphere.

8. Installation according to claim 7, [characterized in that] wherein the rinsing stages (21-23) and the heating stage (41) and the heating stage (42) are screened from each other by intermediate walls (24).